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Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly entitled "World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world"
Second session
3-14 April 2000
Item 2 (b) of the provisional agenda*
Preparations for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world": consideration of the draft final document of the special session

Proposed outcome: revised text submitted by the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee

The Chairman's working draft is in three parts:

Part I (Reaffirmation of the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Summit for Social Development), to be undertaken by the Preparatory Committee as a separate exercise, contains a short political declaration that could be adopted by the General Assembly at its special session;

Part II (Review and assessment of implementation) was adopted by the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-eighth session;

Part III (Further initiatives for inclusion in the outcome of the special session) contains elements for inclusion and elaboration by the Preparatory Committee at its second session and adoption by the General Assembly at its special session.

Part I
Reaffirmation of the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Summit for Social Development

Political Declaration

1. Five years have passed since the World Summit for Social Development, which marked the first time in history that heads of State and Government had gathered to recognize the significance of social development and human well-being for all and to give these goals the highest priority into the twenty-first century. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action established a pact for the eradication of poverty and national and international standards for social development.

2. We, the representatives of Governments and peoples, meeting at this special session of the General Assembly in Geneva to assess progress and decide on

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further initiatives to accelerate social development for all, reaffirm the commitments and strategies adopted at the Social Summit and will continue to apply them to public policy. In confronting the social challenges of our time, we have undertaken to translate words into deeds.

3. Since the Social Summit, recognition of the imperative of social development has spread and strengthened. The review and appraisal conducted in preparation for this special session has shown us that nations have attempted to improve the well-being of their peoples, that all have more to learn, that all have experiences worth sharing and that there is no single, universal path to achieving social development.

4. Growing global integration and continuing rapid technological advances offer previously unimagined opportunities for social and economic progress; but they have also contributed to intensifying crises, insecurity, exclusion and inequality within and between societies. Considerable obstacles to participation in the global economy remain. Rampant inequalities in income, wealth and opportunity defeat the ideal of social justice and increase the possibility of social disintegration. Unless social and economic development are extended within nations and worldwide, a growing number of people, countries and even entire regions will be condemned to lasting marginalization.

5. We therefore reiterate our determination and duty to eradicate poverty, to ensure that opportunities are available for productive and fairly remunerated employment and to heal conflict and strengthen social solidarity. Achievements must be assessed not in terms of economic activity alone, but also in terms of the security, personal initiative, equality and freedom of people and the degree of opportunity and justice that societies provide all their members. An effective regulatory structure set by transparent and accountable government is a necessary condition.

6. A more determined application of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action is also necessary. Integrated and coherent social and economic policies are required to strengthen the links between growth, poverty eradication and social development and close the gap between goals and achievements. We invite the United Nations to lead a process involving the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the International Labour Organization, the World Trade Organization and other multilateral organizations in the elaboration of an agreed strategy conducive to strengthening the quality and consistency of the support by the international community for social and economic development. This in turn requires not only renewed political will but also the mobilization and allocation of additional resources at both national and international levels.

7. Societies require economies conducive to promoting participation, integrity and social justice. Accessible high-quality education, as well as health and welfare services available to all and provided by the appropriate combination of the public sector, civil society and private business in each country, are essential.

8. We dedicate ourselves to maintaining, strengthening and extending social solidarity through policies and programmes for cohesive and caring societies so that all people — women as well as men, the young as well as older persons, people with disabilities and all other individuals and groups with special needs — can live fulfilling lives.

9. Enhanced international cooperation is essential for managing globalization in the interests of all countries and peoples. International policies and institutions must be extended and strengthened to enlarge the range of global public goods and to enable democratic participation in international discourse by all countries to improve the prospects that the gains promised by economic growth and global integration will be shared equitably and that poverty will be banished from the world.

10. Determined to give new momentum to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action, we here set out further initiatives on which our Governments have agreed. We invite all people in all countries and in all walks of life, both as individuals and through the public, private or civil society organizations of which they are a part, to join in renewed dedication to our shared vision for a more just and equitable world.

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Part I
Reaffirmation of the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Summit for Social Development

(To be undertaken by the Preparatory Committee as a separate exercise.)

Part II
Review and assessment of implementation

Overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development: draft agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission for Social Development

1. One of the most important developments since the World Summit for Social Development in March

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1995 is the increased priority which social development has been given in national and international policy objectives. The Summit also signified a recognition by States of the importance of making social improvement an integral part of development strategy at the national and international levels, as well as placing people at the centre of development efforts. The review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit shows that many new national policies and programmes have been initiated. The Summit has clearly also had an impact on the United Nations system, leading to a refocusing of its activities and galvanizing action. However, it is equally clear that the national and international policy responses have been uneven. Despite some advances, there has been little progress in some key areas, and regress is evident in others. As noted in one of the key issues of the analytical report of the Secretary-General, one major development since the Summit is that inequality within and among States continues to grow. Achieving the goals agreed at the Summit will require much stronger and more comprehensive action and new, innovative approaches (to be contained in part III) by all actors, national and international, governmental and non-governmental, taking into account the outcomes of the relevant United Nations conferences and summits.

2. Since the Summit, globalization has presented new challenges for the fulfilment of the commitments made and the realization of the goals of the Summit. Globalization and interdependence have provided many beneficial opportunities but have also involved potential damage and costs. If anything, these forces have accelerated and often strained the capacity of Governments and the international community to manage them for the benefit of all. Economic growth has been impressive in some places and disappointing in others. Current patterns of globalization have contributed to a sense of insecurity as some countries, particularly developing countries, have been marginalized from the global economy. The growing interdependence of nations, which has caused economic shocks to be transmitted across national borders, as well as increased inequality, highlights weaknesses in current international and national institutional arrangements and economic and social policies and reinforces the importance of strengthening them through appropriate reforms. There is wide recognition of the need for collective action to anticipate and offset the negative social and economic consequences of globalization and to maximize its benefits for all members of society, including those with special needs. For most developing countries, the terms of international trade have worsened and inflows of concessional financial resources have declined. The high debt burden has weakened many Governments' capacity to service their increasing external debt and eroded resources available for social development. Inappropriate design of structural adjustment programmes has weakened the management capacity of public institutions as well as the ability of Governments to respond to the social development needs of the weak and vulnerable in society and to provide adequate social services.

3. Since the Summit, policies and programmes to achieve social development have been implemented within the context of national economic, political, social, legal, cultural and historical environments. There has been an increasing interest in strengthening an enabling environment for sustainable development through the interaction of economic and social development and environmental protection. However, these national environments have been increasingly affected by global influences and forces beyond the control of individual Governments. Serious impediments to social development, many of which were identified by the Summit, still persist. These include: chronic hunger; malnutrition; illicit drug problems; organized crime; corruption; foreign occupation; armed conflicts; illicit arms trafficking; terrorism; intolerance and incitement to racial, ethnic, religious and other hatreds; xenophobia; endemic, communicable and chronic diseases, in particular HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis; and economic sanctions and unilateral measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

4. The ultimate goals of development are to improve living conditions for people and to empower them to participate fully in the economic, political and social arenas. Some Governments, in partnership with other actors, have contributed to an enabling environment for social development through efforts to ensure democracy and transparency in decision-making; the rule of law; accountability of government institutions; empowerment of women; and gender equality. Efforts have also been made to promote peace and security; respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development; and tolerance and

respect for cultural and ethnic diversity. However, progress in all these areas has been uneven and requires further effort.

5. At the Summit, quantitative targets were adopted and reaffirmed in the area of basic social services and official development assistance. Out of 13 targets, for 9 the target date set was the year 2000. These target areas are: education; adult illiteracy rate; improved access to safe water supply and sanitation; malnutrition among children under 5 years of age; maternal mortality, infant mortality and the under-five mortality rate; life expectancy; malaria mortality and morbidity; and affordable and adequate shelter for all. Available data indicate that progress in these areas remains unsatisfactory. In the field of education, for example, there are still 29 countries which have enrolment ratios of less than 50 per cent, instead of the target of 80 per cent of children attending primary school.

6. Gender mainstreaming is widely accepted but in some parts of the world the implementation of this concept has often not started. In many countries, women continue to suffer from discrimination with regard to the full enjoyment of all human rights.

7. The compilation of broad-based and disaggregated data by national Governments, both qualitative and quantitative indicators, to evaluate progress in the areas covered by the targets, has presented an important challenge. In this regard, Governments may, as appropriate, seek assistance from international organizations. Since the Summit, efforts have been made to improve the quality, timeliness and country coverage of data.

8. Given the nature and the broad scope of many of the goals and targets set in Copenhagen and the inevitable lag between the initiation of policies and measurable results, a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of new policies and programmes will take time. However, it is possible to make the following early assessments.

Poverty eradication

9. One of the most significant outcomes of the Summit has been placing the goal of eradicating poverty at the centre of national and international policy agendas. At the international level, development targets adopted at Copenhagen have increasingly influenced the policies and planning of bilateral and multilateral development partners. Many Governments have set national poverty reduction targets and formulated poverty eradication plans and strategies, including by promoting employment and developing or reinforcing tools to evaluate progress. Some have further developed existing poverty eradication plans, programmes and measures. Microcredit and other financial instruments have received increasing attention as effective means of empowering the poor and many countries have expanded access to such programmes. Many countries have achieved improvements in literacy, life expectancy, school enrolment and the availability of basic social services, and have enhanced social protection systems and reduced infant mortality. However, progress has been uneven, revealing continuing disparities in access to basic social services, including a lack of access to quality education. Of particular concern in this regard is the increasing feminization of poverty and the uneven access to education for girls. For example, while countries in East Asia and the Pacific have achieved enrolment rates similar to those in developed countries, almost one third of school-age children in Africa are still without access to any form of education. In South Asia, it is estimated that 50 million children are out of primary school. Also, enrolment rates in some economies in transition have been declining. Groups with special needs are also affected by social exclusion and by poverty in different manners. In many countries, there are insufficient measures for improving their situation.

10. Progress in eradicating poverty has been mixed. In many countries, the number of people living in poverty has increased since 1995. In many developing countries, social service provision has deteriorated, leaving many without access to basic social services. Lack of resources, inadequate levels of economic development and, in most cases, the worsening terms of international trade, as well as weak infrastructures and inefficient administrative systems have all undermined measures to eradicate poverty. Demographic changes in many parts of the world have led to new challenges and caused new obstacles in eradicating poverty. In Africa and the least developed countries, economic growth has barely resumed. Also, in some countries with economies in transition, economic reform has been slow and social security arrangements have weakened. In several developed countries, economic growth and rising incomes have improved the living conditions of many people. In some developed countries, however, unemployment has

contributed to situations of inequality, poverty and social exclusion. Countries affected by the recent international crises have experienced a sharp increase in poverty, especially among women and groups with special needs, and unemployment. Although there are now some signs that growth is resuming, the sharp reverse in this area has pushed back their progress in poverty reduction and employment by several years.

11. At the Social Summit and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the international community recognized expressly that women and men experience poverty differently, unequally, and become impoverished through different processes and that if those differences are not taken into account, the causes of poverty cannot be understood or dealt with by public actions. Persistent discrimination against women in the labour market, the existing gap in their wages, and unequal access to productive resources and capital as well as education and training and the sociocultural factors that continue to influence gender relations and preserve the existing discrimination against women continue to hinder women's economic empowerment and exacerbate the feminization of poverty. Equality between women and men is widely accepted as essential for social development, but its implementation, including by mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes aimed at eradicating poverty and the empowerment of women, has lagged behind.

Full employment

12. While the overall progress since the Summit in reducing unemployment has been slow and uneven, there has been increased attention by Governments as well as civil society, including the private sector, to the goal of full employment and to policies aimed at employment growth, as well as a renewed perception that full employment is a feasible goal. Employment promotion has increasingly been put at the centre of socio-economic development, in recognition of the central importance of employment to poverty eradication and social integration.

13. The international community has also recognized the need to promote employment that meets labour standards as defined by relevant International Labour Organization (ILO) and other international instruments, including prohibitions on forced and child labour, guarantees of the rights of freedom of association and bargaining collectively, equal remuneration for men and women for work of equal value and non-discrimination in employment. This is reflected in the ILO's adoption of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and Its Follow-up, and in the unanimous adoption of the ILO Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. While some progress has been made in this respect, universal ratification of the relevant ILO conventions has not yet been achieved.

14. Many developed countries have strengthened their active employment promotion measures, including the introduction of programmes to create jobs in social services and in the provision of other public goods. These activities are sometimes relatively labour-intensive and also meet a growing demand for personal services, particularly for the elderly. In developing countries and those with economies in transition, labour-intensive public works programmes, in particular infrastructure investments in rural access roads, including farm-to-market roads, environmental rehabilitation, irrigation and urban regeneration schemes, have proven to be effective means of promoting employment and stimulating people-centred sustainable development. The important role of education and of, vocational and skills development training at all levels in promoting employment, particularly in the long term, is increasingly recognized.

15. While in most countries the employment of women has increased steadily, gender inequalities, reflected for instance in the wage gap, and a disproportionate share of family responsibilities, in particular, have remained obstacles to women's equal access to and participation in the labour market. Furthermore, in countries experiencing a lack of adequate employment and/or declining employment rates, women are often disproportionately affected and forced into the low-paid informal sector and out of social safety nets. In many parts of the world, this situation has also led to poverty and social exclusion, with inhuman consequences such as forced prostitution, trafficking in women and children for purposes of prostitution and for sexual and other forms of exploitation, as well as the worst forms of child labour. At the same time, women's unpaid work remains unrecognized and unaccounted for in the national accounts. To date, no universal measurement tools have been developed to evaluate women's unpaid work.

16. There has been an increase in casual and informal employment since the Summit. Casual employment arrangements have tended to spread in industrialized economies, with increasingly flexible labour markets and new mechanisms for subcontracting. In developing countries, the lack of growth of employment in the formal sector, among other factors, has led many people, especially women, into informal sector work and has increased migration to more attractive labour markets in other countries. While employment growth still remains the most effective means of reducing poverty, there appears to be a growing number of employed and underemployed persons, particularly women, with little employment security, low wages and low levels of social protection. In a number of countries, considerable attention has been focused on this issue in recent years, including the development of new initiatives. In some countries with economies in transition, there has been extensive growth of the shadow economy.

17. As a means of combating social exclusion, there have been efforts to integrate income support policies with active labour market policies for those marginalized from the labour market. It is increasingly being recognized that these policies are an important tool to reduce the dependency of individuals on social assistance and to reintegrate them into the world of work and into society.

18. In a number of countries, social dialogue among employers, employees and Governments has contributed to social and economic development.

Social integration

19. Social integration is a prerequisite for creating harmonious, peaceful and inclusive societies. Promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, promotion of a culture of peace, tolerance and non-violence, respect for cultural and religious diversity, elimination of all forms of discrimination, equal opportunities for access to productive resources and participatory governance are important for social integration. Governments have developed new policy instruments, set up institutional arrangements, strengthened participation and dialogue with all social actors and launched programmes to foster social cohesion and solidarity. However, lack of access to education, the persistence of poverty and unemployment, and inequitable access to opportunities and resources have caused social exclusion and marginalization. A growing number of people are afflicted by poverty because of the inequitable distribution of opportunities, resources, incomes and access to employment and to social services. In many countries, there is a growing schism between those in high-quality, well-paid employment and those in poorly remunerated, insecure jobs with low levels of social protection. Owing to continued discrimination and exclusion, women and girls face particular disadvantages in this regard.

20. Governments have made progress in promoting more inclusive societies. The adoption of democratic forms of government by an increasing number of countries offers opportunities for all to participate in all spheres of public life. The devolution of political power, the decentralization of administration and the development of local and municipal authorities have sometimes contributed to the creation of inclusive and participatory societies. In some countries, there are also consultative arrangements that enable wider involvement in the planning and evaluation of policies. In those countries, Governments as well as civil society, including the private sector, are involved in these processes. An encouraging development has been the strengthening of civil society, including non-governmental organizations and volunteers. In many countries, this provides the means for people to work together through partnerships with Governments, thereby promoting and protecting common interests and complementing the action of the public sector. The promotion and protection of all human rights, including the right to development, is an important element in the promotion of social integration. In this context, it is noted that the overall level of ratification of international human rights instruments has increased considerably since the Summit; however, universal ratification has not yet been achieved.

21. Governments have implemented a wide range of policies and programmes to respond to the special needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and to strengthen their participation in development processes through the provision of, *inter alia*, social services, employment opportunities, credit, skill development and training. However, further efforts in this area are required.

22. *The protection of immigrants and migrant* workers required the adoption of a broad range of targeted policies. Governments were urged to ensure protection of the human rights and dignity of migrants

irrespective of their legal status. Governments were also urged to intensify efforts to provide basic social services, facilitate family reunification of documented migrants, promote social and economic integration of documented migrants, and ensure their equal treatment before the law. There has not been enough accession and ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families for it to come into force. Since the Summit, progress in implementing international instruments on the protection of migrants has been limited and problems concerning the violation of the human rights of migrants have persisted. In many parts of the world, migrants have been subjected to discrimination and documented migrants have not received adequate social protection.

23. Despite attempts to address the causes leading to and the pressures resulting from the movement of refugees and displaced persons, many countries, especially those hosting large refugee populations, have required international support to provide basic social services.

24. While there has been incremental but uneven movement towards equality and equity between women and men in all regions of the world, the fact remains that women are the most affected in times of crisis and economic restructuring. Whereas many countries have adopted national strategies on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including general policy recommendations and specific plans of action, concrete progress in improving the status of women and promoting gender equality has been slow and uneven. All forms of violence against women and girls remain a persistent problem for all countries and create obstacles to social integration, hindering the advancement of gender equality and the full enjoyment of human rights by women.

25. There has been continued recognition that the family is the basic unit of society and that it plays a key role in social development and is a strong force of social cohesion and integration. In different cultural, political and social systems, various forms of the family exist.

26. The increase in violent conflicts, including those around issues of local autonomy and ethnic identity, as well as conflicts over the distribution of resources, have hampered social integration and diverted attention and resources from social and economic development to conflict management. This development has underlined the importance of social integration and access to basic social services as preventive measures against crises. Access to basic social services in conflict situations and social integration in post-conflict situations have also been underlined as important preventive tools.

27. The obstacles to the realization of the right of peoples to self-determination, in particular of peoples living under colonial or other forms of alien domination or foreign occupation, have continued to adversely affect the achievement of their social and economic development.

28. In some countries, social development is adversely affected by unilateral measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations that create obstacles to trade relations among States, impede the full realization of social and economic development and hinder the well-being of the population in the affected countries.

Africa and the least developed countries

29. At the World Summit for Social Development, Governments committed themselves to accelerating the economic, social and human resources development of Africa and the least developed countries. Many of the objectives undertaken at the Summit are yet to be fulfilled by the countries concerned and their international partners, although, in this regard, donors continue to support the efforts by Africa and the least developed countries.

30. The deteriorating social and economic condition of the least developed countries requires priority attention to the many international development commitments towards those countries which were not met. Many least developed countries have seen their share of official development assistance (ODA) decrease, and progress was not achieved in fulfilling the agreed target of earmarking 0.15 to 0.2 per cent of GNP as ODA for the least developed countries. Technical cooperation provided by the United Nations and its affiliated agencies has been cut back since the Summit.

31. African countries have made real efforts to implement the commitments made at Copenhagen, but internal and external constraints continue to make progress extremely difficult. The mobilization of resources at the national and international levels to

accelerate the economic and social development of Africa and the least developed countries through a holistic approach is needed for the full implementation of the commitments. Equitable access to education and health services, income earning opportunities, land, credit, infrastructure and technology, as well as official development assistance and debt reduction are vital to social development in Africa and the least developed countries.

32. Social indicators in Africa show that the continent falls dramatically short of the targets set at the Summit five years ago. About 90 per cent of countries in sub-Saharan Africa will not meet the year 2000 goals on child mortality. Life expectancy remained lower than 60 years in 41 of the 53 countries during the period 1995-2000. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is having severe social, economic, political and security impacts in some of the hardest hit countries.

33. Progress has been achieved in the development of democratic institutions in a number of countries. Further progress needs to be made in Africa and the least developed countries in strengthening institutions which are transparent and accountable in order to achieve faster economic and social development.

34. In a rapidly globalizing economic world, Africa continues to be marginalized. A persistent decline in the international terms of trade for commodities exported from African countries has reduced real national income and savings to finance investment. The external debt burden has drastically reduced resources available for social development. Furthermore, promises made to provide official development assistance to developing countries in general and the least developed countries in particular have not been fulfilled. More concerted efforts and an internationally enabling environment are necessary to integrate Africa as well as the least developed countries into the world economy.

Mobilization of resources for social development

35. The mobilization of domestic and international resources for social development is an essential component for the implementation of the Copenhagen commitments. Since the Summit, reforms to promote the effective and efficient utilization of existing resources have received increasing attention. However, inadequate national revenue generation and collection, combined with new challenges regarding social services and social protection systems due, for instance, to demographic changes and other factors, jeopardize the financing of social services and social protection systems in many countries. New budgeting and accounting techniques have been adopted in several countries. The involvement and cooperation of local authorities, civil society and beneficiary communities have been found to be valuable in raising efficiency in the delivery of services.

36. In several countries, and for various reasons, a shift has been occurring in the modalities for financing social protection away from universal, publicly provided coverage to income-based, targeted assistance. Among these reasons are stagnant or declining public revenues or the need to reduce fiscal deficits as well as changing priorities for public expenditures. Also, the need to create new employment opportunities and to provide incentives for the unemployed or underemployed and coverage for new social problems as well as to address the specific needs of disadvantaged and marginalized populations has motivated changes in social protection systems. In some countries, the principle of universal free provision of services such as health care, education and water supply has been replaced by user fees and privatization and by more targeted social service provision. However, in many countries, the impact of such measures, especially on the poor and vulnerable, remains to be seen.

37. Despite the renewed commitment at the Summit by donor countries to meet the agreed target of 0.7 per cent of their GNP for official development assistance, the overall ODA has continued to decline. Only four countries now meet the agreed target with one more country about to reach it. In the meantime, the relative role of ODA within various forms of financing for development has also been declining. As a result of the Summit, however, earmarking of funds for social development has been formulated more explicitly in ODA policy. ODA has been found to be more effective when countries are committed to growth-oriented strategies combined with poverty eradication goals and strategies. Poverty eradication through sustainable development is seen by most donor countries as the main objective of development cooperation. The Bretton Woods institutions have also begun to pay more focused attention to the social development dimension in their structural adjustment programmes

and lending policies. This process is currently being further strengthened.

38. The 20/20 initiative has encouraged interested Governments and donors to increase the amount of resources earmarked for basic social services and to enhance equity and efficiency in their use. It has also emphasized the need for additional resources in order to pursue effectively the social development agenda, while highlighting the difficulties and limitations of many countries, in particular developing countries, in raising or reallocating domestic resources.

39. There is greater acceptance that the increasing debt burden faced by the most indebted developing countries is unsustainable and constitutes one of the principal obstacles to achieving progress in people-centred sustainable development and poverty eradication. For many developing countries, as well as countries with economies in transition, excessive debt servicing has severely constrained their capacity to promote social development and provide basic services. Although the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative has the potential to reduce debt-servicing costs significantly for the countries it covers, the fact remains that it has so far benefited only a few of them. This initiative has recently been strengthened to provide faster, deeper and broader debt relief. This debt relief is provided in the context of poverty reduction strategies where Governments and civil society cooperate to make commitments to utilize the financial benefits to alleviate poverty. A few lender countries have adopted bilateral debt cancellation initiatives which go beyond the HIPC Initiative.

40. Microcredit and other financial instruments provide financial and other services to people who are often overlooked by the traditional banking sector, thus trying to reach the poorest families. Women play a very important role in such initiatives. Experience shows that women are creditworthy, and when they earn an income they are able to contribute more directly to the economy.

41. Since the Summit, the external debt problems of the middle-income developing countries have crippled their social development efforts. A need has arisen for concerted national and international action to address effectively the debt problems of middle-income developing countries with a view to resolving their potential long-term debt-sustainability problems.

Capacity-building to implement social policies and programmes

42. Capacity-building is an important means of creating a national political, socio-economic and legal environment conducive to development and social progress. Member States have taken a number of actions to enhance their capacities to achieve the goals of the World Summit for Social Development, including adopting long-term strategies for social development; conducting national assessments of their institutional capacities; taking legislative action to create an enabling environment; establishing partnerships with civil society; involving people in the management of their local affairs; mainstreaming a gender perspective into policies and programmes; improving transparent and accountable governance; strengthening the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of social policies, programmes and projects; and providing technical cooperation. However, the years since the Summit have also been marked by growing constraints on the capacity for public action. In some countries, increased constraints, including fiscal and political ones on Governments, have resulted in a reduction of the programmes and activities of the State.

43. The State has an important role in the provision of basic social services. However, in several countries, the State is no longer the sole provider of social services but rather the enabler of an overall favourable environment for social development, with increased responsibility for ensuring equitable delivery of and access to quality social services. This development has increased the need for stronger public institutions to provide an effective framework to ensure an equitable provision of basic social services for all. It is also recognized that an effective and accountable public sector is vital to ensuring the provision of social services.

44. International cooperation has been a critical element in the efforts of Governments towards capacity-building for social development. Technical cooperation, including that of the United Nations, has been supportive of such efforts by Governments, although in many areas such cooperation should be strengthened and broadened.